



US009252991B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Zhang

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,252,991 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Feb. 2, 2016**

(54) **SUB-BAND FEEDBACK FOR
BEAMFORMING ON DOWNLINK MULTIPLE
USER MIMO CONFIGURATIONS**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 69 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **13/205,257**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 8, 2011**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2012/0039196 A1 Feb. 16, 2012

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/372,378, filed on Aug.
10, 2010.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

H04L 1/00 (2006.01)

H04L 25/03 (2006.01)

H04W 24/10 (2009.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **H04L 25/03343** (2013.01); **H04L 25/0398**
(2013.01); **H04L 25/03808** (2013.01); **H04L**
2025/03815 (2013.01); **H04W 24/10** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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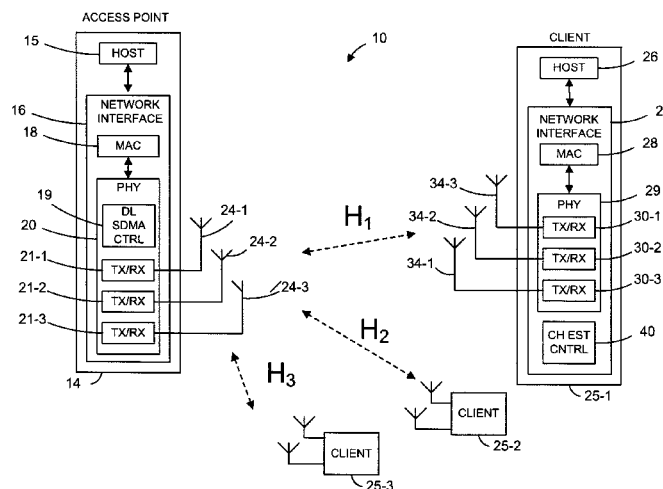
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ABSTRACT

A method in a communication network includes an access point, using a multiple input multiple output antenna configuration, sending out a sounding packet to a plurality of client stations. The client stations determine a channel estimation of the sounding packet, but only a channel estimation of a portion of the entire sounding packet to avoid processing the entire packet. The resulting partial estimation is sent to the access point for using in transmit beamforming. In other examples, the client station sends a reverse link sounding packet over a portion a channel having a bandwidth less than the sounding packet, and from this the access point determines partial channel estimations and transmit beamforming conditions.

22 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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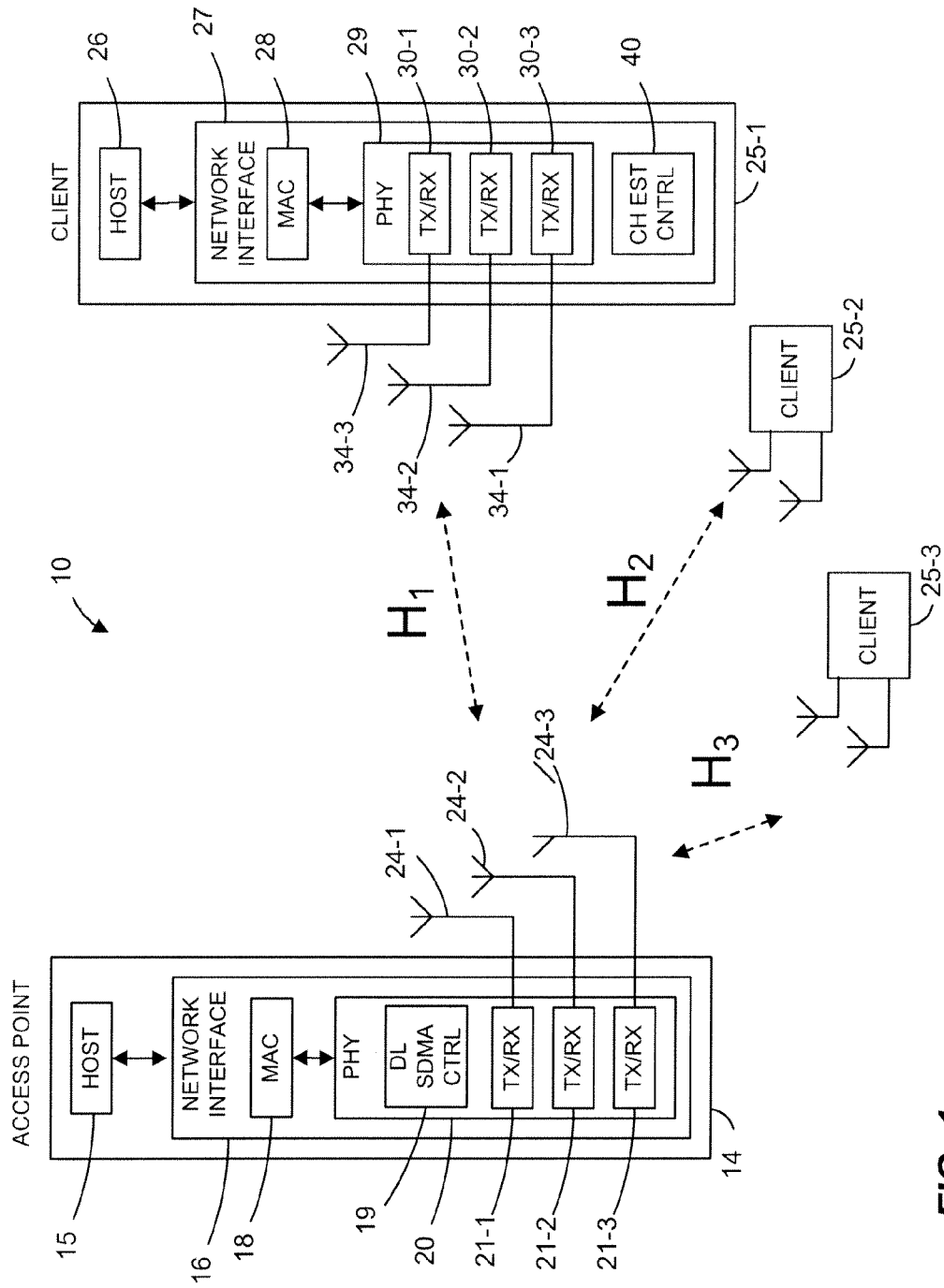


FIG. 1

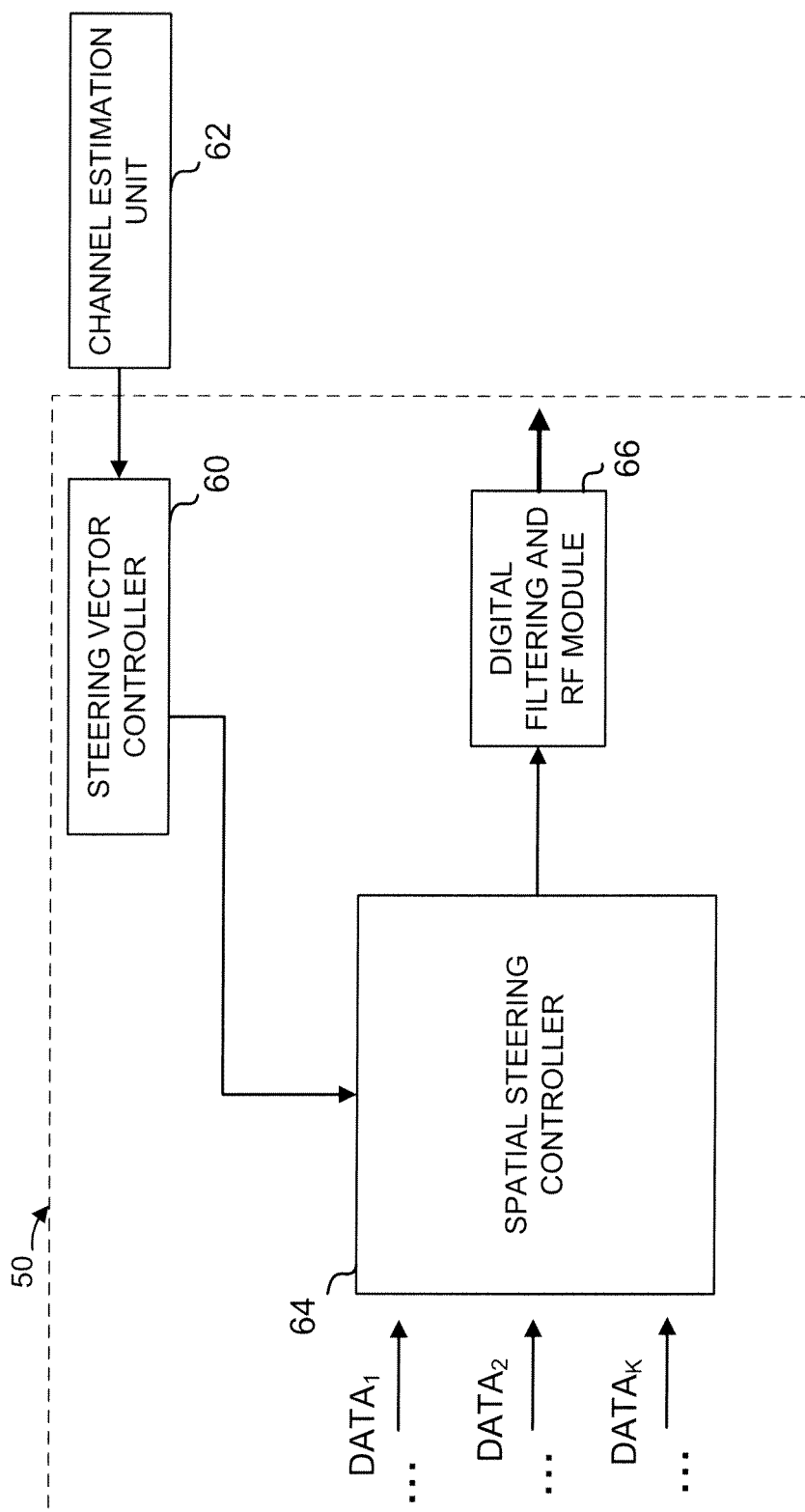


FIG. 2

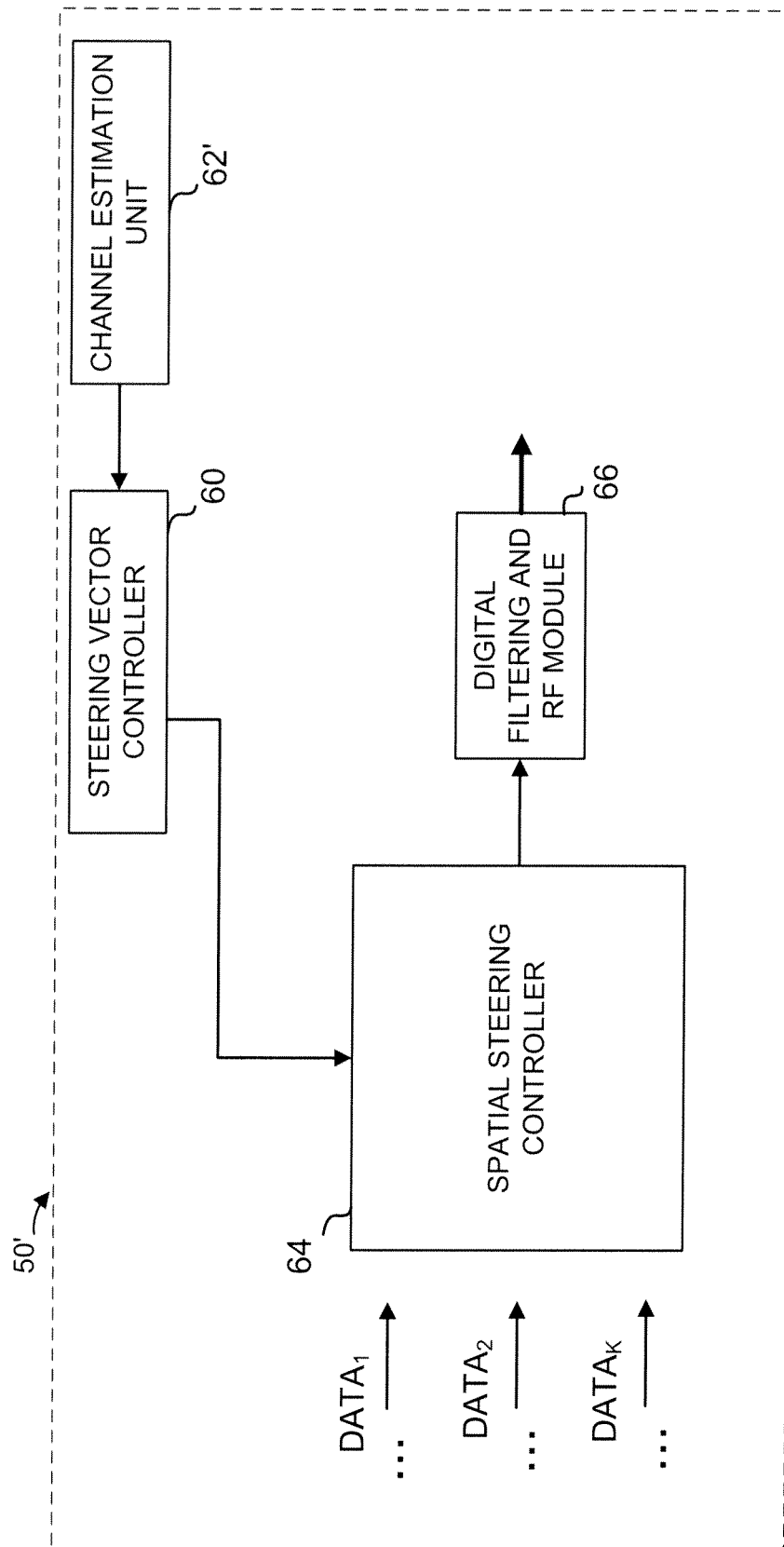
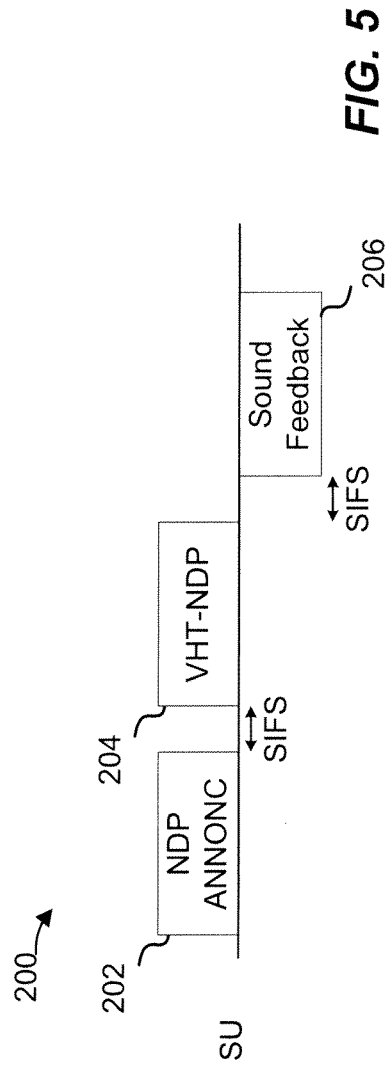
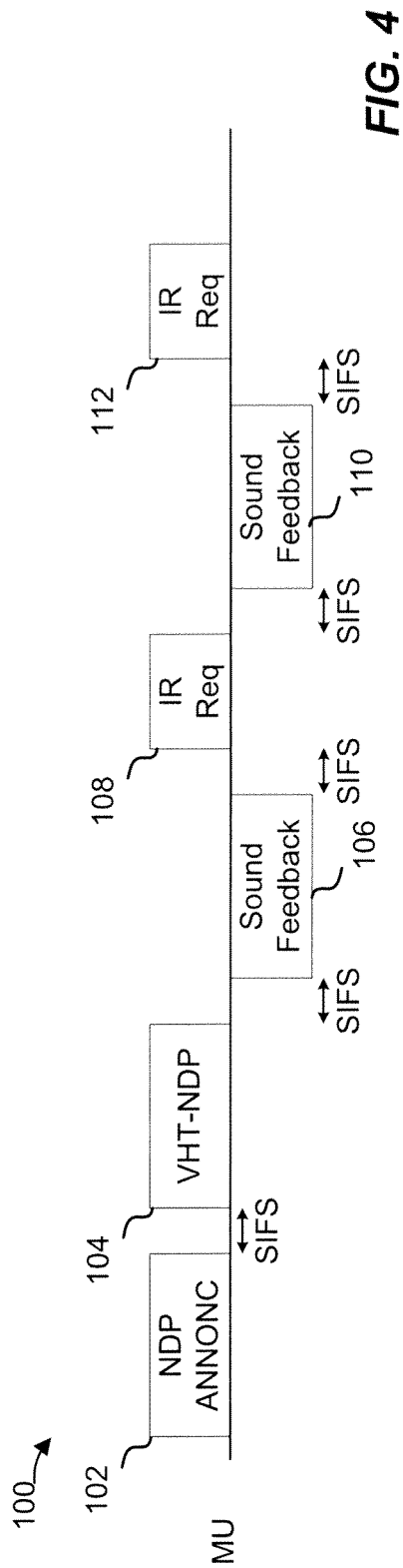
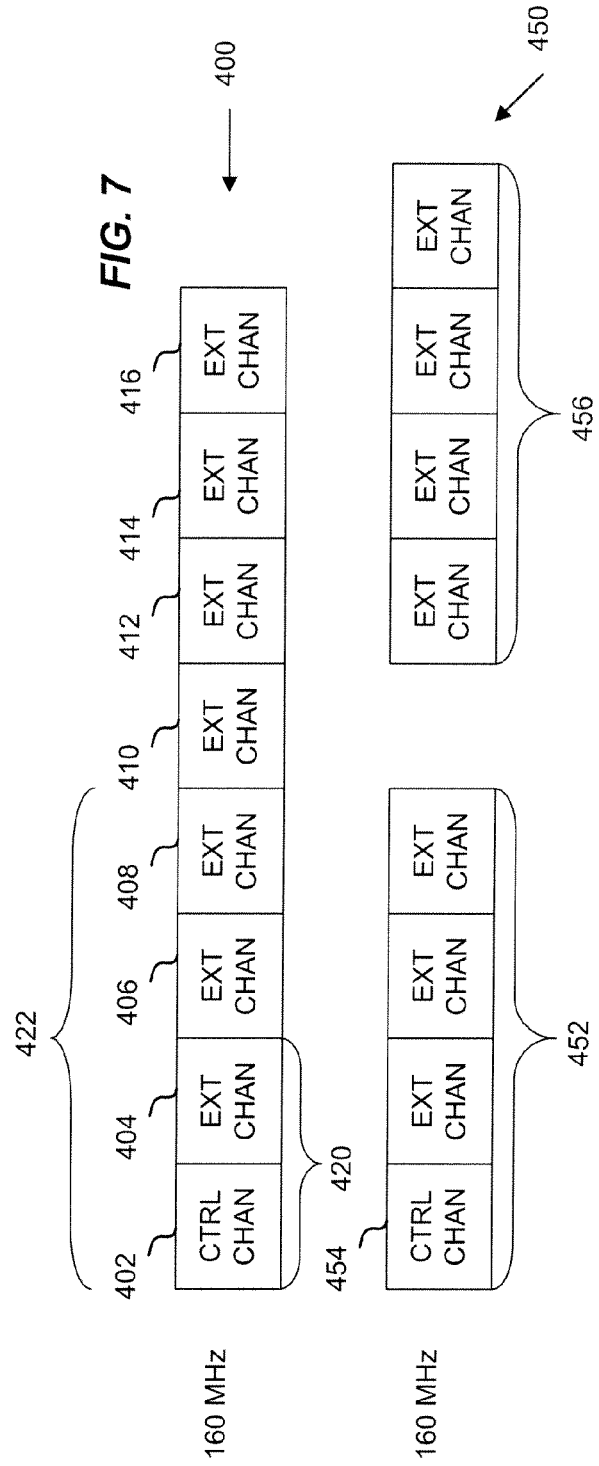
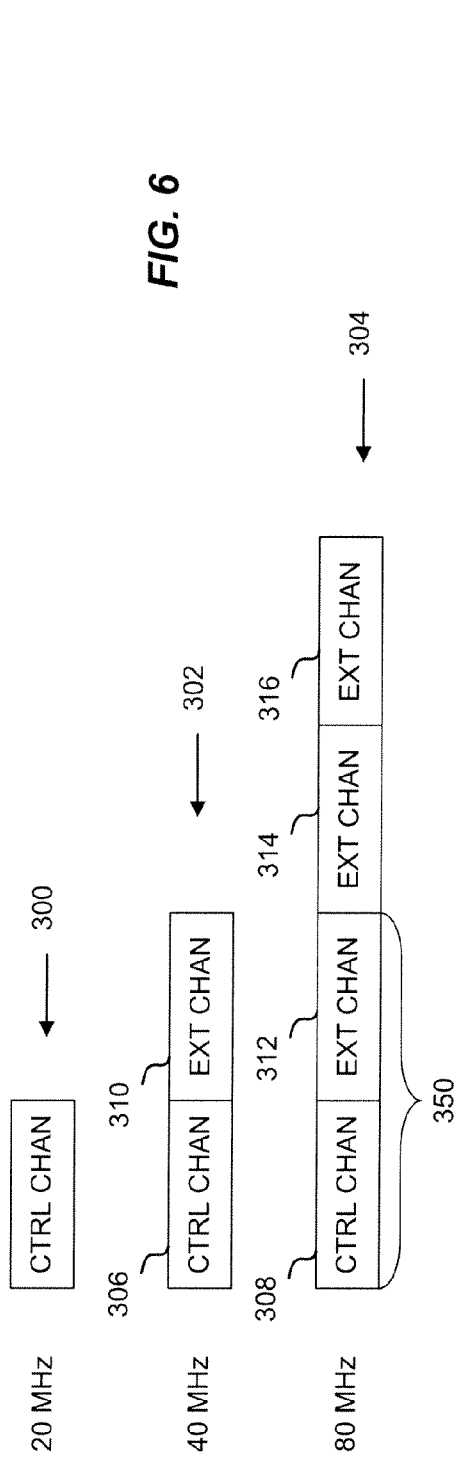
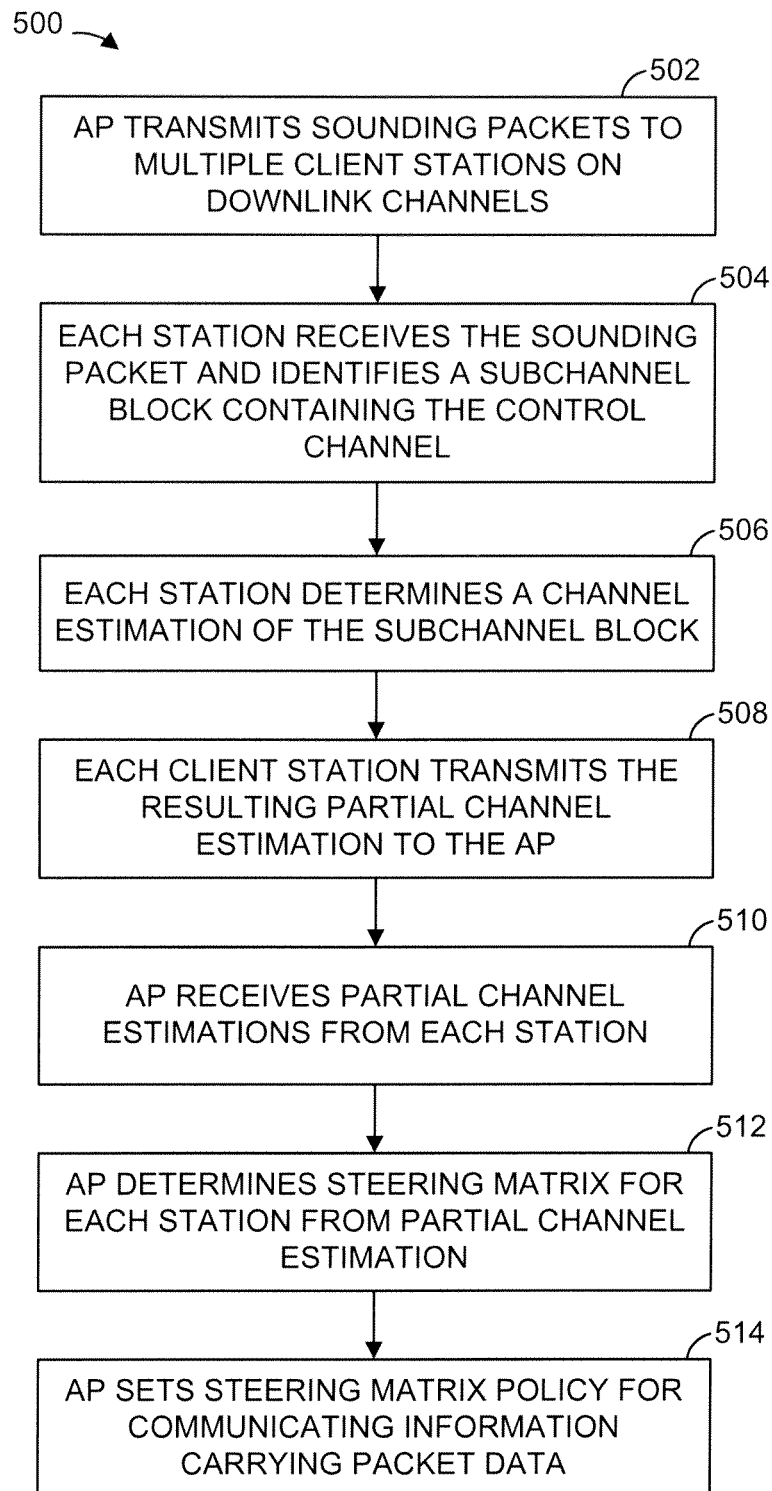
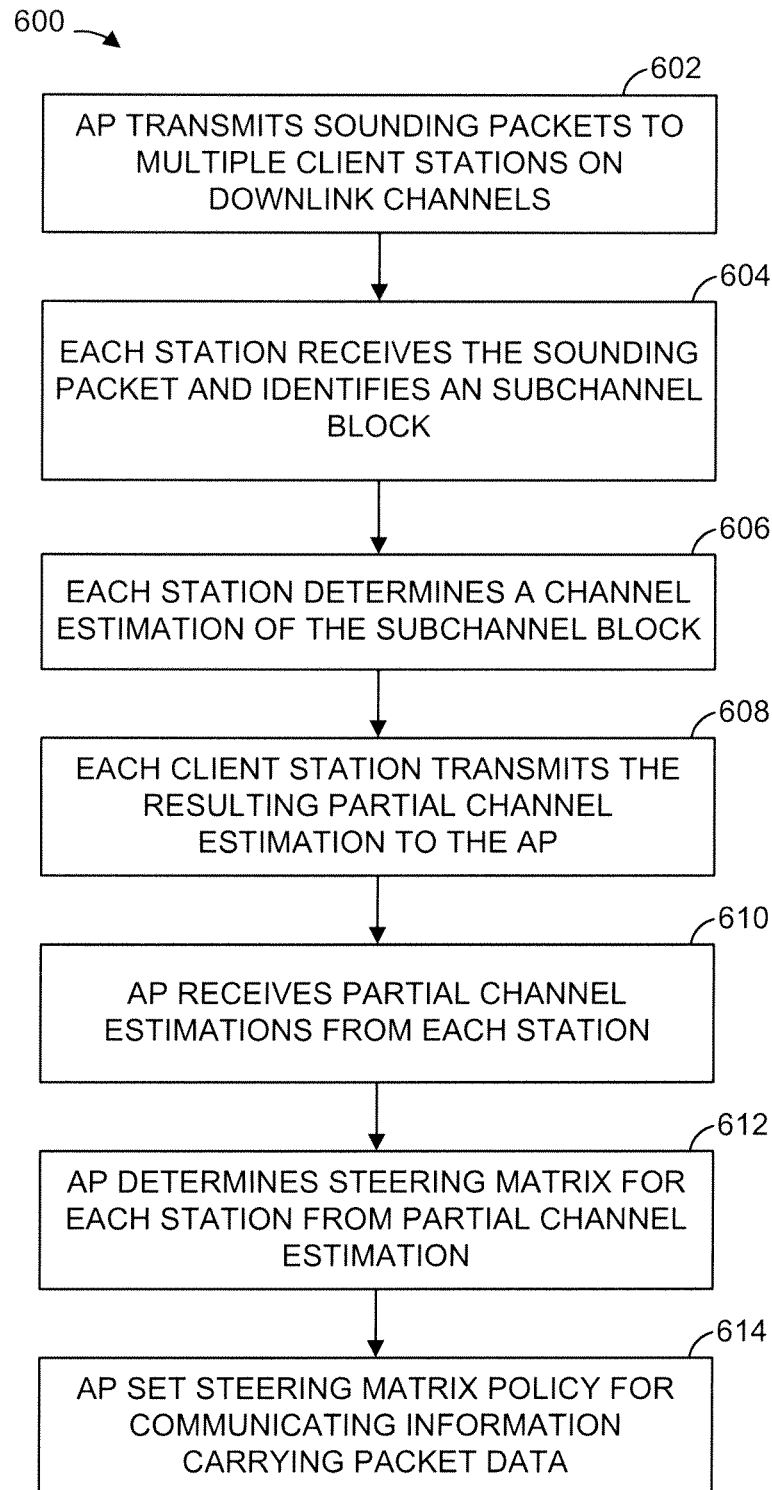


FIG. 3





**FIG. 8**

**FIG. 9**

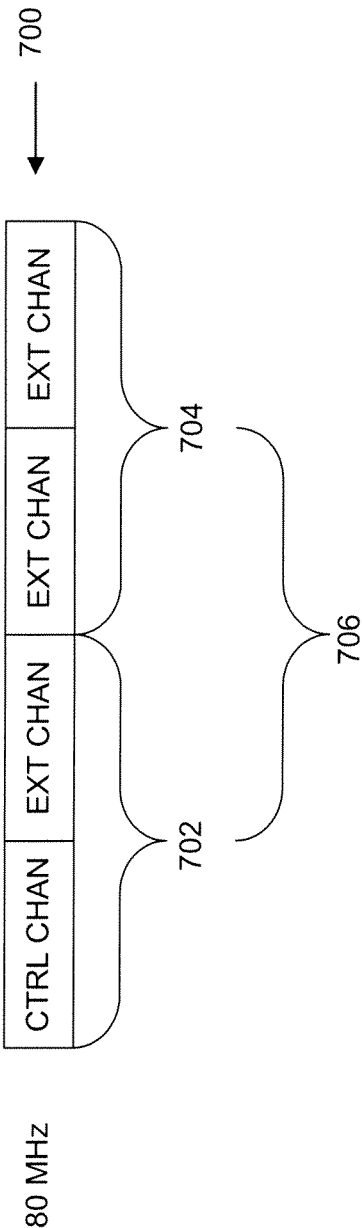


FIG. 10

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SUB-BAND FEEDBACK FOR BEAMFORMING ON DOWNLINK MULTIPLE USER MIMO CONFIGURATIONS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

The present disclosure claims the benefit of the U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/372,378, filed on Aug. 10, 2010, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure relates generally to communication networks and, more particularly, to beamforming on wireless networks capable of communicating with multiple users simultaneously.

BACKGROUND

The background description provided herein is for the purpose of generally presenting the context of the disclosure. Work of the presently named inventors, to the extent it is described in this background section, as well as aspects of the description that may not otherwise qualify as prior art at the time of filing, are neither expressly nor impliedly admitted as prior art against the present disclosure.

Wireless local area network (WLAN) technology has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Development of WLAN standards such as the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11a, 802.11b, 802.11g, and 802.11n Standards has improved single-user peak data throughput. For example, the IEEE 802.11b Standard specifies a single-user peak throughput of 11 megabits per second (Mbps), the IEEE 802.11a and 802.11g Standards specify a single-user peak throughput of 54 Mbps, and the IEEE 802.11n Standard specifies a single-user peak throughput of 600 Mbps. Work has begun on a new standard, IEEE 802.11ac that will be operated in the 5 GHz bands overlapping with legacy IEEE 802.11a/n systems and with promises of throughputs exceeding 6.9 Gbps. Unlike the other standards, the IEEE 802.11ac Standard will allow simultaneous communication from an access point to multiple different client stations.

WLANs typically operate in either a unicast mode or a multicast mode. In the unicast mode, an access point (AP) transmits information to one user station at a time. In the multicast mode, the same information is transmitted to a group of client stations concurrently. With IEEE 802.11ac Standard, the multicast mode is able to transmit to multiple client stations at a time.

Antennas and, accordingly, associated effective wireless channels are highly directional at frequencies near or above 60 GHz. When multiple antennas are available at a transmitter, a receiver, or both, it is therefore important to apply efficient beam patterns using the antennas to better exploit spatial selectivity of the corresponding wireless channel. Generally speaking, beamforming is a signal processing technique for using multiple transmit antennas to produce an output that combines constructively at one or more receive antennas, e.g. by producing an antenna gain pattern having one or more high gain lobes or beams (as compared to the gain obtained by an omni-directional antenna) at the receive antennas, with reduced gain in other directions. If the gain pattern for multiple transmit antennas, for example, is configured to produce a high gain lobe in the direction of a receiver, better

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transmission reliability can be obtained over that obtained with an omni-directional transmission.

Beamforming requires knowledge of the downstream channel between the access point and each client device. Generally, for protocols like IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n, this means that the access point will receive feedback signals indicative of the downstream channel. However, with IEEE 802.11ac, and protocols that allow for simultaneous communications with multiple client stations, the size (bandwidth) of the downstream channel can be large enough that feedback signals indicative of the entire downstream channel are difficult to produce. A high demand is placed on hardware of the responding client devices called upon to provide feedback on the entire downstream channel.

SUMMARY

In an embodiment, a method in a communication network, the method includes (i) sending, from an access point, a sounding packet to a client device over a wireless downlink communication channel, the sounding packet having a packet bandwidth and comprising a plurality of subchannels; (ii) receiving, at the client device, the sounding packet and identifying a subchannel block of the sounding packet, wherein the subchannel block has a subchannel block bandwidth that is smaller than the packet bandwidth; (iii) performing a channel estimation on the subchannel block to determine a partial channel estimation of the downlink communication channel; and (iv) communicating the partial channel estimation of the downlink communication channel to the access point.

In another embodiment, an apparatus include a channel estimation unit configured to, receive a sounding packet from a access point, the sounding packet having a packet bandwidth and comprising a plurality of subchannels, identify a subchannel block within the sounding packet, where the subchannel block has a subchannel block bandwidth that is smaller than the packet bandwidth, perform channel estimation on the subchannel block to determine a partial channel estimation of a downlink communication channel, and communicate the partial channel estimation of the downlink communication channel to the access point.

In another embodiment, an access point apparatus including a plurality of antennas for simultaneous communication on a plurality of downlink channels; a steering vector controller configured to receive, from a client device, a partial channel estimation of the one of the downlink channels between the access point and the client device, and wherein the steering vector controller is configured to identify a steering matrix for use in communicating on the downlink channel between the access point and the client device; and spatial steering unit configured to apply the identified steering matrix to information carrying packet data prior to the access point further communicating with the client device over the one of the downlink channels.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 a block diagram of an example wireless local area network (WLAN) in which an access point (AP) utilizes downlink (DL) Spatial-Division Multiple Access (SDMA) steering techniques in accordance with an embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a DL SDMA controller at an access point and working in conjunction with a channel estimation unit at a client station, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a DL SDMA controller that is used in an AP that implements steering techniques of the present disclosure, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 4 is a timing diagram of a channel description feedback multiple client station example;

FIG. 5 is a timing diagram of a channel description feedback single client station example;

FIG. 6 is a diagram of data portions from three different IEEE 802.11ac signals, having packet bandwidths 20 MHz, 40 MHz, and 80 MHz, respectively;

FIG. 7 is a diagram of data portions from two different IEEE 802.11ac signals, having packet bandwidths of 160 MHz but in a contiguous and non-contiguous formation;

FIG. 8 illustrates an example method for performing a partial channel estimation and feedback in either an explicit beamforming or implicit beamforming configuration, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 9 illustrates an example method for performing a partial channel estimation and feedback in either an explicit beamforming or implicit beamforming configuration, according to another embodiment; and

FIG. 10 is a diagram of data portions of an IEEE 802.11ac signal having an 80 MHz packet bandwidth and showing all combinations of subchannel blocks as may be identified by the method of FIG. 9.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In embodiments described below, a wireless network device such as an access point (AP) of a wireless local area network (WLAN) transmits independent data streams to multiple client stations simultaneously via an antenna array. To reduce interference at a receiving station due to transmissions from the AP to one or more other stations, the AP supports transmit beamforming, in which the AP develops respective transmit (Tx) beamsteering (hereinafter, "steering") vectors for downlink transmissions to each station. In an embodiment, the AP develops a Tx steering vector for a certain client station using only a description of the wireless communication channel between the AP and the station. In some other embodiments, the AP develops the Tx steering vector for a client station by also considering a description of at least one other wireless communication channel between the AP and another station.

To perform this transmit beamforming, the AP relies upon knowledge of the downlink channel between the AP and each client station. This downlink channel knowledge is obtained either through explicit beamforming, where the client device receives a sounding packet from the AP, develops steering vectors for the downlink channel, and transmits those steering vectors back to the AP, or through implicit beamforming, in which the client device sounds the reverse link of the downlink channel and the AP determines the steering vectors based on that sounding. In either case, the AP uses such downlink information as "channel descriptions" from which the AP will apply steering vectors for transmit beamforming.

Explicit beamforming typically uses one of three types of feedback channel descriptions. With channel state information (CSI) feedback, the client station estimates the downlink channel from a sounding packet from the AP and feeds back the estimated channel gains. With uncompressed steering matrix feedback, the client station, based on the channel estimate from a sounding packet from the AP, determines the steering matrix that is to be used at the AP. The client station then feeds back this steering matrix, without compression. With compressed steering matrix feedback, a similar process occurs, but the steering matrix is fed back in a compressed form.

For the IEEE 802.11ac Standard, the AP is to support multiple user MIMO configurations, as discussed further in

regards to FIGS. 1 and 2, in which the AP is able to use the downlink transmission to simultaneously transmit distinct signals to multiple intended client stations. For such MU-MIMO operation, all downlink channels may have the same bandwidth. Further, each client station may have knowledge of the number of streams (within each downlink channel) being transmitted to the other client stations, as well as the modulation and coding scheme (MCS) values used at the AP for those other client stations. In this way, there need not be any coordination or collaboration between the client stations; instead, the transmit beamforming of the AP is used to simultaneously communicate with the different client stations and to do so in a way that attempts to minimize interference between the signals received at each client station.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an example wireless local area network (WLAN) 10, according to an embodiment. An AP 14 includes a host processor 15 coupled to a network interface 16. The network interface 16 includes a medium access control (MAC) unit 18 and a physical layer (PHY) unit 20. The PHY unit 20 includes N_T transceivers 21, and the transceivers are coupled to N_T antennas 24. Although three transceivers 21 and three antennas 24 are illustrated in FIG. 1 (i.e., $N_T=3$), the AP 14 can include different numbers (e.g., $N_T=2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8$, etc.) of transceivers 21 and antennas 24 in other embodiments. The PHY unit 20 also includes a downlink (DL) Spatial-Division Multiple Access (SDMA) controller 19 that implements one or several of the techniques for developing steering vectors described herein.

The WLAN 10 includes K client stations 25, each station 25-i equipped with N_i antennas. Although three client stations 25 are illustrated in FIG. 1 (i.e., $K=3$), the WLAN 10 can include different numbers (e.g., $K=2, 4, 5, 6$, etc.) of client stations 25 in various scenarios and embodiments. Two or more of the client stations 25 are configured to receive corresponding data streams having been simultaneously transmitted from the AP 14.

A client station 25-1 includes a host processor 26 coupled to a network interface 27. The network interface 27 includes a MAC unit 28 and a PHY unit 29. The PHY unit 29 includes N_1 transceivers 30, and the N_1 transceivers 30 are coupled to N_1 antennas 34. Although three transceivers 30 and three antennas 34 are illustrated in FIG. 1 (i.e., $N_1=3$), the client station 25-1 can include different numbers of transceivers 30 and antennas 34 (e.g., $N_1=1, 2, 4, 5$, etc.) in other embodiments. The PHY unit 27 may include, in some embodiments, a channel estimation controller 40 that implements portions of the techniques for developing steering vectors described herein. The client stations 25-2 and 25-3 have a structure that is the same as or generally similar to the client station 25-1. In an embodiment, each of the client stations 25-2 and 25-3 is structured like the client station 25-1 but has only two transceivers and two antennas (i.e., $N_2=N_3=2$). In other embodiments, the client stations 25-2, and 25-3 can include different numbers of antennas (e.g., 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, etc.). Although, only an example implementation, in the IEEE 802.11ac Standard, it is believed that the AP will have up to 8 antennas and support simultaneously communication with up to 4 stations.

In the illustrated embodiment, the AP 14 is configured to transmit multiple spatial streams simultaneously to the client stations 25-1, 25-2, and 25-3, so that each of client stations 25-i receives data via L_i spatial streams. For example, the client station 25-1 receives data via three (i.e., $L_1=3$) spatial streams. Although in this example $L_1=N_1$, a client station 25-i in general can utilize fewer spatial streams than the number of antennas with which the client station 25-i is equipped. Further, when space-time coding is employed, the multiple spatial streams are sometimes referred to as space-time streams. If the number of space-time streams is less than the number of transmit chains, spatial mapping is employed, in some embodiments.

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In an embodiment, the AP **14** communicates with the client station **25-1** over a multiple input, multiple output (MIMO) channel defined, at the one end, by the array including the antennas **24-1**, **24-2**, and **24-3** and, at the other end, by the array including the antennas **34-1**, **34-2**, and **34-3**. For this example, the MIMO channel can be described by a three-by-three channel matrix H_1 that specifies, in each element, a channel gain parameter for a stream defined by the corresponding transmit antenna and a receive antenna and a channel phase between the corresponding pairs of antennas. Similarly, the AP communicates with the clients **25-2** and **25-3** via MIMO channels described by matrices H_2 and H_3 , respectively. In at least some embodiments, the dimensionality of a matrix H_i describing a MIMO channel between the AP **14** and a client station **25-i** is $N_T \times N_R$.

For protocols like IEEE 802.11n, which support transmit beamforming in an optional mode, or protocols like IEEE 802.11ac, which support transmit beamforming to multiple users simultaneously, the AP **14** will steer the downlink channel, described by the channel descriptor, H_i , to an intended receiver station using the one or more spatial streams (L_i), where such steering improves the signal-to-noise ratio at the intended station.

With respect to FIG. 1, to develop the steering matrices for each station, the system can be modeled as though the AP **14** is transmitting a symbol to a client station **254** as a transmit symbol vector x_i of dimensionality $L_i \times 1$, and the client station **254** receives a signal that can be represented as a vector y_i of dimensionality $N_i \times 1$.

Therefore, in an embodiment, communication is modeled as though the AP **14** would apply a respective steering vector W_i of dimensionality $N_T \times L_i$ to a transmit symbol vector x_i for transmitting the signal via the corresponding channel H_i . Thus, when the AP **14** simultaneously transmits data to stations **25-1**, **25-2**, . . . **25-K**, the signal received at the client station **25-i** can be expressed as

$$y_i = \underbrace{H_i W_i x_i}_{\text{intended}} + \underbrace{H_i \sum_{k \neq i} W_k x_k}_{\text{interference}} + \underbrace{n_i}_{\text{noise}} \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

As illustrated by Eq. 1, the received signal would include an intended component, an interference component due to signals intended for other client stations, and a noise component (expressed as a vector n_i of dimensionality $N_i \times 1$). Eq. 1 also can be written as

$$y_i = H_i W_i x_i + H_i \sum_{k \neq i} W_k x_k + n_i = H_i [W_1 \ W_2 \ \dots \ W_K] \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ \vdots \\ x_K \end{bmatrix} + n_i = H_i W x + n_i, \quad i = 1 \dots K \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$$

where

$$W = [W_1 \ W_2 \ \dots \ W_K], \quad x = \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ \vdots \\ x_K \end{bmatrix}$$

Further, the signals y_1, y_2, \dots, y_K can be “stacked” together to define an aggregate receive vector y :

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$$y = \begin{bmatrix} y_1 \\ y_2 \\ \vdots \\ y_K \end{bmatrix} = H_T W \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ \vdots \\ x_K \end{bmatrix} + \begin{bmatrix} n_1 \\ n_2 \\ \vdots \\ n_K \end{bmatrix} = H_W x + n \quad (\text{Eq. 3})$$

where

$$H_T = \begin{bmatrix} H_1 \\ H_2 \\ \vdots \\ H_K \end{bmatrix}, \quad H_W = \begin{bmatrix} H_1 W_1 & H_1 W_2 & \dots & H_1 W_K \\ H_2 W_1 & H_2 W_2 & \dots & H_2 W_K \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ H_K W_1 & H_K W_2 & \dots & H_K W_K \end{bmatrix},$$

$$\text{and } n = \begin{bmatrix} n_1 \\ n_2 \\ \vdots \\ n_K \end{bmatrix}.$$

In an implicit beamforming example, the DL SDMA controller **19** may develop the aggregate steering matrix W (that includes the individual vectors W_1, W_2, \dots, W_K) so as to achieve a configuration optimal for the overall group of K client stations **25**, i.e., with a reduction in the interference between the AP and each station, based on simultaneous communications with the other stations. For example, the DL SDMA controller **19** may use channel information (“channel descriptions”) to reduce interference for some or all of the users by optimizing any suitable metric.

In an explicit beamforming example, these techniques may be partially or wholly implemented at one or more of the client stations **25-i**, i.e., in the channel estimation controller **40**. For example, the channel estimation controller **40** at the client stations may determine the steering matrix W for the downlink channel between the access point and the respective client station.

Example implementations are discussed below.

Referring to FIG. 2, an SDMA controller **50** illustrates operation of the DL SDMA controller **19** in an explicit beamforming configuration, where the channel information is determined at a client station. Generally, a steering vector controller **60** receives channel descriptions from a channel estimation unit **62** and provides resulting steering vectors W_1, W_2, \dots, W_K to a spatial steering unit **64**, which applies a respective steering vector W_i to each transmit symbol vector x_i . In the explicit beamforming example of FIG. 2, the channel estimation unit **62** is at the client station, e.g., at the channel estimation controller **40** of the client station **25-1**.

In operation, to perform transmit beamforming to each of the client stations **25-i**, a digital filtering and RF module **66** receives a sounding packet signal from the spatial steering unit **64**. That sounding packet is transmitted either to multiple client stations or to a single client station. In response, and as discussed further below, the channel estimation unit **62** develops a partial channel estimation, i.e., a channel description, for the physical downlink channel between the AP **14** and the respective client station **25-i**. In some embodiments, the channel description includes channel gain parameters (which may be complex numbers) for various streams defined by transmit and receive antennas. In some such examples, the channel description is represented in a matrix format, either uncompressed or compressed. While in some embodiments, the channel estimation unit **62** performs measurement of one or several parameters associated with the physical channel to develop CSI or another metric that is sent back to the AP **14** and then used by the steering vector controller **60** to deter-

mine steering vectors W_1, W_2, \dots, W_K . In general, the channel estimation unit **62** can implement any suitable technique for developing channel descriptions. For example, when calculating steering vectors/matrix for a multiple-user (MU) communication, a zero-forcing (ZF) technique, a minimum mean square error (MMSE) technique, a leakage suppression (LS) technique, or a block nullification (BN) technique may be used. In embodiments where the AP **14** is only communicating with a single client station, a single-user beamforming (SU-BF) technique may be used.

FIG. **3** illustrates a similar configuration (labeled **50'**) to that of FIG. **2**—and therefore like reference numerals are used—except used for implicit beamforming, in which the channel estimation unit **62'** is implemented at the AP **14**. In an embodiment, in response to receipt of a downlink signal, each station **25-i** sends an reverse channel sounding packet to the AP **14**, which sounding packets are received at the channel estimation unit **62'**. For example, immediately upon receipt of the sounding packet, the client station **25-i** will determine the bandwidth of the sounding packet and send a reverse channel sounding packet having a smaller bandwidth, and corresponding to subchannels of the initial sounding packet. The channel estimation unit **62'** receives that reverse channel sounding packet and performs partial channel estimation of the downlink channel. The channel estimation unit **62'** communicates that estimation with the steering vector controller **60** directly; and the controller **60** determines the steering vectors for each client station and communicates those to the spatial steering unit **64**. Thus, in an example implicit beamforming embodiment, the channel estimation unit **62'** at the AP **14** estimates the downlink channel based on the received uplink sounding packets from the stations **25-i**, and without a feedback signal.

In either explicit beamforming or implicit beamforming, for the present embodiments, the channel description or reverse-link sounding packet, respectively, spans only over a portion of the entire downlink channel.

FIG. **4** illustrates an example timing diagram of a channel description feedback for transmit beamforming a downlink channel to multiple users. The AP **14** transmits, to all client stations, a null data pack (NDP) sounding packet **100** containing a header frame having an NDP announcement frame **102** and a very high throughput (VHT) null data packet control frame (VHT-NDP) **104**, spaced apart by a short inter-frame space (SIFS).

In response to receiving the NDP sounding packet **100**, the client station **25-i**, in particular channel estimation unit **62**, in an explicit beamforming example, examines a portion of the received NDP sounding packet **100** and determines a channel description for that examined portion. Specifically, in some embodiments, the channel estimation unit **62** determines a CSI feedback over the examined portion of the NDP sounding packet **100**, while in other examples, the unit **62** determines an uncompressed or compressed steering matrix feedback over the portion.

The client station **25-i** then transmits, after a SIFS period, the partial channel estimation feedback frame **106** to the AP **14**. The AP **14** receives the partial channel estimation feedback frame **106** and determines an immediate response (IR) request frame **108** which is sent to indicate to the next client station to provide its partial channel estimation feedback frame **110**, which is then sent to the original client device **25-i**, after a SIFS period. The process repeats with the next IR request frame **112**, until all client devices have responded.

FIG. **5** illustrates an example timing diagram of a channel description feedback for transmit beamforming a downlink channel to a single user (SU-BF). The AP **14** transmits a null

data pack (NDP) sounding packet **200** containing an NDP announcement frame **202** and a VHT-NDP frame **204**, spaced by a SIFS period. In response, the client station examines a portion of the NDP sounding packet to determine the partial channel estimation (CSI feedback, compressed steering matrix, or uncompressed steering matrix), which the client station sends back as the partial channel estimation frame **206**.

Packet bandwidths in an IEEE 802.11ac frame, which can vary depending on the AP and the client station, and are formed at 20, 40, 80, or 160 MHz, where the 160 MHz bandwidth packet can be contiguous or non-contiguous.

FIG. **6** illustrates examples of data packets, e.g., the VHT-NDP frames **104** and **204**, of a 20 MHz, 40 MHz, and 80 MHz size. A 20 MHz data packet **300** is formed of a 20 MHz wide control channel, or primary channel. Each of the 40 MHz data packet **302** and the 80 MHz data packet **304** also include a 20 MHz control channel **306** and **308**, respectively. The data packet **302** further includes a 20 MHz subband extension channel **310**; and the data packet **304** further includes three 20 MHz subband extension channels **312**, **314**, and **316**. While the control channels **302**, **306**, and **308** are illustrated as located at the same least significant bit (LSB) locations for each of the data packets **300**, **302**, and **304**, in other examples, the data packets may be in other locations. In any of the different bandwidths, a 20 MHz control channel subband will be present.

FIG. **7** illustrates a 160 MHz contiguous data packet **400** containing a 20 MHz control channel **402** and contiguous extension channels **404-416**. FIG. **7** also illustrates a similar, but non-contiguous 160 MHz data packet **450**, having a first 80 MHz packet **452**, containing the control channel **454**, and a second 80 MHz packet **456** spaced from the first packet **452**.

The higher bandwidth of these IEEE 802.11ac data packets and the desire to provide an immediate channel estimation feedback, i.e., within the SIFS period, along with the larger number of transmit antennas used for MU-MIMO communications, means that full channel estimation is difficult. Therefore, as discussed above, the client station feedbacks on only a portion of the received NDP sounding packet, more specifically over a subchannel block of the full data packet bandwidth. This partial channel estimation occurs whether the feedback is a CSI estimation or a compressed or uncompressed steering matrix. The partial channel estimation may be based on the control channel, in some examples, or based on any sub-channel in other examples.

FIG. **8** illustrates an example method **500** for performing a sub-channel channel estimation and feedback on a control channel of an IEEE 802.11ac data packet. At a block **502**, the AP **14** transmits a NDP sounding packet to each of the client stations **25-i** on the network. At a block **504**, a client station receives the NDP sounding packet and identifies a subchannel block which contains the control channel. Each client station, at a block **506**, determines a channel estimation of that sub-channel block, by determining a CSI or a compressed or uncompressed steering matrix of that portion. The client station then sends a partial channel estimation feedback signal to the AP **14** at a block **508**.

To implement the block **504**, and in reference to FIGS. **6** and **7**, for the 20 MHz data packet **300**, the block **504** identifies the full channel for channel estimation. For the 40 MHz data packet **302**, the block **504** identifies the 20 MHz control channel **306**, so that the client station does not provide channel estimation based on the extension channel **310**. For the 80 MHz data packet **304**, in some examples, the block **504** identifies a LSB 40 MHz subchannel block **350**, which contains the control channel **306** and provides this portion to the block

506 for channel estimation. For the contiguous 160 MHz data packet **400**, in some examples, the block **504** identifies a 40 MHz subchannel block **420** for channel estimation. In other examples, the block **504** identifies a larger 80 MHz subchannel block **422** for channel estimation. The block **504** may perform the same function for the non-contiguous 160 MHz data packet **450**, identifying a 40 MHz subchannel block **452** or an 80 MHz subchannel block **456**. While example subchannels are described, the process **500** is not limited to performing channel estimation on these subchannels. Rather any subchannel block of the full data packet may be identified and estimated, where in the illustrated example, that portion also includes the control channel.

The channel estimation feedback, from block **508** includes a control frame identifying the width of subchannel block used for determining the partial channel estimation. In some examples, the feedback includes a MIMO Control Field that indicates the total bandwidth of the partial channel estimation, 20, 40, or 80 MHz. From this Control Field, the AP **14** can determine which portion of any data packet to the client station is to receive the steering matrix, because the bandwidth is determined starting with the location of the control channel. For example, a MIMO Ctrl Field would have an extended Bandwidth Subfield that is 2 bits long, indicating one of 20, 40, 80, or 160 MHz as the bandwidth of the channel estimation. In the example of 160 MHz, the channel estimation has been performed on the entire NDP sounding packet.

At a block **510** of the process **500**, the AP **14** receives the partial channel estimation and, at a block **512**, determines the steering matrices for the transmitting client station. For example, for an explicit beamforming partial channel estimation, the steering vector controller **60** stores an uncompressed steering matrix from the client station or uncompresses (expands) and then stores the uncompressed steering matrix. If a CSI feedback is transmitted as the partial channel estimation, then the steering vector controller **60** determines the steering matrix based on the CSI feedback. In an implicit beamforming, the block **512** receives the partial reverse link sounding packet to the channel estimation unit **62'** at the AP **14**; and the channel estimation unit **62'** determines the channel estimation which is provided to the steering vector controller **60'** which then determines the steering matrix for the transmitting client station.

At a block **514**, steering vector controller **60** sets the steering matrix policy for the AP **14**. When the AP **14** is to transmit to a particular client station over a partial data packet corresponding to the subchannel block identified by block **504**, steering vector controller **60** applies the steering matrix identified in the partial channel estimation or derived from the partial channel description. For the illustrated example, the partial steering matrix is therefore applied when the AP **14** is transmit a partial data packet containing a control channel and extensions that correspond to the original subchannel block.

If the AP **14** is to send a data packet having a bandwidth larger than the original subchannel block, including the full bandwidth of the data packet, then at the block **514**, the spatial steering unit **64** will apply the steering matrix determined from the partial channel estimation to only a portion of the data packet, in particular the LSB portion of the data packet corresponding to the original subchannel block. For example, for the contiguous 160 MHz data packet **400**, with the original subchannel block **420**, if the AP **14** is transmitting to a client station on only the first 40 MHz of the data packet, then the spatial steering unit **64** is to apply the steering matrix from the partial channel estimation to the entire data packet (because the first 40 MHz also correspond to the subchannel block **420**). If, however, the data packet is larger than 40 MHz, for

example 80 MHz (corresponding to block **422**) or 160 MHz (corresponding to the entire data packet **400**), then the spatial steering unit **64** applies the steering matrix from block **512** to only the LSB 40 MHz portion **422** and the remaining extension sub-channels are broadcast without application of steering matrices or application of a default steering matrices stored on the AP **14**. For another example, if the data packet's bandwidth is larger than the bandwidth of the steering matrices, the AP may choose not to apply the steering matrices across all the packet bandwidth. When there is only one client being involved, then the process in FIG. **8** represents the sub-band beamforming for the case of SU-TxBF.

FIG. **9** illustrates another example method **600** for performing a sub-channel channel estimation and feedback on a control channel of an IEEE 802.11ac data packet. At a block **602**, the AP **14** transmits a NDP sounding packet to each of the client stations **25-i** on the network. At a block **604**, a client station receives the NDP sounding packet and identifies any subchannel block thereof. That is, unlike the process **500**, the process **600** can perform partial channel estimation on any portion of data packet. FIG. **10**, for example, illustrates an 80 MHz data packet **700**. The block **604** may identify any of three different 40 MHz subchannel blocks **702**, **704**, and **706**. In some examples, the block **604** is configured to only identify the LSB subchannel block **702** or the upper significant bit (USB) subchannel block **704**, and not the intermediate subchannel block **706**.

The client station, at a block **606**, then determines a channel estimation of that subchannel block, by determining a CSI or a compressed or uncompressed steering matrix of that portion. The client station then sends a channel estimation feedback signal to the AP **14** at a block **608**.

For the process **600**, the channel estimation feedback signal is to include a control frame that indicates which of all possible combinations of subchannels was used for the partial channel estimation. In some examples, the control frame is an MIMO Control Field of the channel estimation feedback that has a bit length long enough to identify each combination of subchannels, i.e., greater than 2 bits in length. In some examples, an 8 bit control field is used, representing each of the up to eight 20 MHz subchannels.

At a block **610**, the AP **14** receives the partial channel estimation and, at a block **612**, determines the steering matrices for the transmitting client station, both in a similar manner to that of FIG. **5**. The steering matrix policy setting of block **614**, however, is different from that of block **514**. For the block **614**, the steering vector controller **60** sets a steering matrix policy whereby whenever the transmitted signal on the downstream channel either fully or partially corresponds to the original subchannel block of the NDP sounding packet, the AP **14** will apply the steering matrix determined from the partial channel estimation. That is, even if the data packet to be transmitted is larger than the original subchannel block, if that data packet includes, at least partially, the original subchannel block, the steering matrix is applied. The block **614** will apply the steering matrix if the data packet exactly matches the subchannel block. Further, if the entire data packet is to be used, the block **614** determines that the spatial steering unit **64** is to apply the steering matrix over that portion of the data packet corresponding to the original subchannel block. For another example, if the data packet's bandwidth is larger than the bandwidth of the steering matrices, the AP may choose not to apply the steering matrices across all the packet bandwidth. When there is only one client being involved, then the process in FIG. **9** also represents the sub-band beamforming for the case of SU-TxBF.

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At least some of the various blocks, operations, and techniques described above may be implemented utilizing hardware, a processor executing firmware instructions, a processor executing software instructions, or any combination thereof. When implemented utilizing a processor executing software or firmware instructions, the software or firmware instructions may be stored in any computer readable memory such as on a magnetic disk, an optical disk, or other storage medium, in a RAM or ROM or flash memory, processor, hard disk drive, optical disk drive, tape drive, etc. Likewise, the software or firmware instructions may be delivered to a user or a system via any known or desired delivery method including, for example, on a computer readable disk or other transportable computer storage mechanism or via communication media. Communication media typically embodies computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data in a modulated data signal such as a carrier wave or other transport mechanism. The term "modulated data signal" means a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal. By way of example, and not limitation, communication media includes wired media such as a wired network or direct-wired connection, and wireless media such as acoustic, radio frequency, infrared and other wireless media. Thus, the software or firmware instructions may be delivered to a user or a system via a communication channel such as a telephone line, a DSL line, a cable television line, a fiber optics line, a wireless communication channel, the Internet, etc. (which are viewed as being the same as or interchangeable with providing such software via a transportable storage medium). The software or firmware instructions may include machine readable instructions that, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to perform various acts.

When implemented in hardware, the hardware may comprise one or more of discrete components, an integrated circuit, an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC), etc.

While the present invention has been described with reference to specific examples, which are intended to be illustrative only and not to be limiting of the invention, changes, additions and/or deletions may be made to the disclosed embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, one or more operations in methods discussed above may be performed in a different order (or concurrently) and still achieve desirable results.

What is claimed is:

1. A method in a communication network, the method comprising:

- (i) receiving, at a client device, a sounding packet from an access point device over a wireless downlink communication channel having a plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, the sounding packet having a packet bandwidth that spans the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels;
- (ii) at the client device, identifying a subchannel block of the sounding packet, wherein the subchannel block spans only a subset of the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, and the subchannel block has a subchannel block contiguous bandwidth that is a) at least 20 MHz and b) smaller than the packet bandwidth of the sounding packet;
- (iii) performing a channel estimation (a) on the subchannel block, but (b) not on any other 20 MHz-wide subchannels of the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, to determine a partial channel estimation of the downlink communication channel; and
- (iv) communicating, to the access point in a feedback frame, the partial channel estimation of the downlink

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communication channel so that the access point can determine a steering matrix from the partial channel estimation for application to only a portion, in frequency, of an information carrying data packet, transmitted by the access point, when the information carrying data packet has a bandwidth larger than the subchannel block, wherein the feedback frame includes an indication of a bandwidth of the subchannel block to which the partial channel estimation corresponds, wherein the portion of the information carrying data packet corresponds in frequency to the subchannel block.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the sounding packet is a null data packet (NDP) sounding packet containing (i) an announcement frame and (ii) a very high throughput control frame.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the (i)-(iv) are performed for each of a plurality of client stations.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein performing the channel estimation on the subchannel block comprises determining, at the client device, a compressed steering matrix from the subchannel block.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein performing the channel estimation on the subchannel block comprises determining, at the client device, an uncompressed steering matrix from the subchannel block.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein performing the channel estimation on the subchannel block comprises determining, at the client device, channel state information from the subchannel block.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the sounding packet is an IEEE 802.11ac sounding packet.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the packet bandwidth of the sounding packet is 40 MHz, 80 MHz, or 160 MHz.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels comprises a 20 MHz-wide control channel and at least one 20 MHz-wide extension channel, wherein identifying the subchannel block of the sounding packet comprises identifying a subchannel block that includes at least the 20 MHz-wide control channel.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein identifying the subchannel block of the sounding packet comprises identifying any combination of at least two contiguous 20 MHz-wide subchannels in the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels as the subchannel block.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

- determining, at the access point, the steering matrix from the partial channel estimation; and
- applying, at the access point, the steering matrix in transmitting the information carrying data packet to the client device on the downlink channel.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein applying the steering matrix in transmitting the information carrying data packet comprises:

- applying the steering matrix to the full information carrying data packet, when the information carrying data packet has a bandwidth that is the same as the packet bandwidth.

13. An apparatus comprising:

- a transceiver configured to receive a sounding packet from an access point, the sounding packet having a packet bandwidth that spans a downlink communication channel having a plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels;
- a channel estimation circuit configured to identify a subchannel block within the sounding packet, wherein the subchannel block spans only a subset of

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the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, and the subchannel block has a subchannel block contiguous bandwidth that is a) at least 20 MHz and b) smaller than the packet bandwidth of the sounding packet, and perform channel estimation (i) on the subchannel block, but (ii) not on any other 20 MHz-wide subchannels of the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, to determine a partial channel estimation of a downlink communication channel;

wherein the transceiver is further configured to communicate, to the access point in a feedback frame, the partial channel estimation of the downlink communication channel so that the access point can determine a steering matrix from the partial channel estimation for application to only a portion, in frequency, of an information carrying data packet when the information carrying data packet has a bandwidth larger than the subchannel block, wherein the feedback frame includes an indication of a bandwidth of the subchannel block to which the partial channel estimation corresponds, wherein the portion of the information carrying data packet corresponds in frequency to the subchannel block.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the channel estimation circuit is configured to perform the channel estimation on the subchannel block by determining a compressed steering matrix from the subchannel block.

15. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the channel estimation circuit is configured to perform the channel estimation on the subchannel block by determining an uncompressed steering matrix from the subchannel block.

16. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the channel estimation circuit is configured to perform the channel estimation on the subchannel block by determining channel state information from the subchannel block.

17. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels comprises a 20 MHz-wide control channel and at least one 20 MHz-wide extension channel, wherein the channel estimation circuit is configured to identify the subchannel block within the sounding packet by identifying a subchannel block that includes at least the 20 MHz-wide control channel.

18. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels comprises a 20 MHz-wide control channel and at least one 20 MHz-wide extension channel, wherein the channel estimation circuit is configured to identify the subchannel block within the sounding packet by identifying any combination of at least two contiguous 20 MHz-wide subchannels in the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels as the subchannel block.

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19. An access point apparatus comprising:
a plurality of antennas;

a network interface device configured to transmit, via the plurality of antennas, a sounding packet over a wireless downlink communication channel that comprises a plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels, wherein the network interface device includes

a steering vector controller configured to receive, from a client device, a feedback frame that includes a partial channel estimation of a subchannel block corresponding to the wireless downlink communication channel between (i) the access point and (ii) the client device, wherein

the partial channel estimation corresponds to only a subset of the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels,

the feedback frame does not include channel estimation information for any other 20 MHz-wide subchannels in the wireless downlink communication channel,

the subchannel block corresponds to only the subset of the 20 MHz-wide subchannels and has a contiguous bandwidth of at least 20 MHz, and

the steering vector controller is configured to use the partial channel estimation to identify a steering matrix for use in communicating on the wireless downlink communication channel between (i) the access point and (ii) the client device, and

a spatial steering controller configured to apply the identified steering matrix to only a portion, in frequency, of an information carrying packet, wherein the portion, in frequency, of the information carrying packet corresponds, in frequency, to the subchannel block.

20. The access point apparatus of claim 19, wherein: the plurality of 20 MHz-wide subchannels includes a 20 MHz-wide control channel; and

the subchannel block includes the 20 MHz-wide control channel.

21. The access point apparatus of claim 19, wherein the steering vector controller is configured to receive channel state information as the partial channel estimation and from the channel state information determine the steering matrix.

22. The access point apparatus of claim 19, wherein the steering vector controller is configured to receive a compressed steering matrix and/or an uncompressed steering matrix as the partial channel estimation to identifying the steering matrix.

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